



# BIRD OF THE MONTH - February



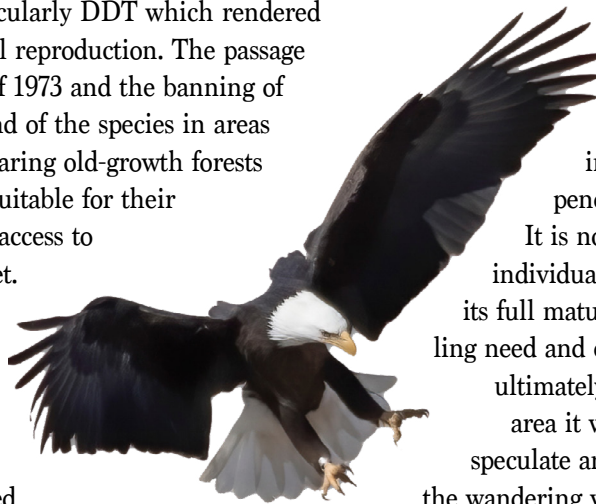
As the national symbol of the United States, the awe inspiring adult Bald Eagle is one of the most recognized birds throughout its vast range of North America. Despite its distinctive appearance and impressive size it was nearly driven to extinction in the lower 48 states by the mid 1900's due to the use of pesticides, particularly DDT which rendered the species incapable of successful reproduction. The passage of The Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the banning of DDT allowed for a partial rebound of the species in areas of the county that still provide soaring old-growth forests near large bodies of fresh water suitable for their nesting requirements with ready access to abundant fish, their preferred diet.

It takes four years for the young Bald Eagle to attain its characteristic adult appearance of a white head, white tail and starkly contrasting dark chocolate brown body. An enormous, hooked yellow bill, powerful yellow talons and piercing yellow eyes round out its fierce, commanding appearance. With a wingspan of nearly eight feet, a Bald Eagle makes an unforgettable impression. The formidable female is an impressive 25% larger than her male counterpart.

The densely populated, urban development of coastal Southern California provides a generally inhospitable habitat for a Bald Eagle. Yet to the surprised delight of Orange

County observers, we have noted one or two young Bald Eagles intermittently appearing in our community over the last few winter seasons.

Although an adult breeding pair forms a solid, life-long monogamous bond, the first four to five years of life are frequently a time for solo roaming, often to great distances from the fledged nest site. The immature bird's mottled brown body with splotches of white indicates its sub-adult status as does its penchant for wandering quite far from range. It is not unusual to see the presumably same individual return in subsequent winters, even into its full maturity. Reaching adulthood, the compelling need and challenging task of finding a mate may ultimately dictate its wandering back towards the area it was born. As rapt observers we can only speculate and remain hopeful for best outcomes for the wandering visitor on its perilous life journey.



*To learn more about the fascinating range of distinctive birds appearing in the Urban Forest and along the Shipley to Shore Nature Trail, visit:*

[hbtrees.org/urban-forest-2/bird-watching-in-the-urban-forest](http://hbtrees.org/urban-forest-2/bird-watching-in-the-urban-forest)

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